



Control Number: 50664



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March 20, 2020

Public Utility Commission of Texas
1701 North Congress Ave.
Austin, Texas 78701

RE: Project No. 50664, *Issues Related to the State of Disaster for the Coronavirus Disease 2019*

Dear Commissioners:

Etex Telephone Cooperative, Inc. and its affiliates (collectively, "Etex") supports its customers during this difficult time. Etex continues to monitor the outbreak of COVID-19 and business practices that will protect its customers and employees so we can continue to provide reliable communications services to our communities. We recognize the importance of our customers having the ability to stay connected during this time of crisis. The high quality communications services, specifically broadband service, provided by Etex and its affiliates are enabling its customers and their families to work from home, participate in online classes that have temporarily replaced school classrooms, engage in online commerce to obtain the supplies they need, access telemedicine resources, access supply goods and services in this time of crisis and stay in contact with family and friends. Etex is taking appropriate precautions to ensure the availability of critical services for the duration of this crisis.

During this time of difficulty, Etex has implemented the following voluntary measures to help all of our customers impacted by COVID-19:

- Etex has notified Shawn Hazard, Emergency Management Coordinator, of its activation of the Pandemic section of our Emergency Operations Plan ("EOP");
- Etex is operating under its EOP. Any outages and restoration efforts, if any, will be filed in Project No. 37277 consistent with 16 Tex. Admin. Code § 26.51 ("TAC"). Any outages will also be reported to outages@puc.texas.gov and in Project No. 37275.
- We are participating in the Federal Communications Commission's ("FCC") Keep Americans Connected Pledge.
 - For the next 60 days, Etex will not disconnect any customer who is unable to pay because their income has been impacted by COVID-19 and we will not charge any late payment fees.
- In addition to the measures we are implementing for residential customers, Etex is also working with all businesses whose income has been impacted by COVID-19 to develop a payment plan that allows them to continue receiving telecommunications services.
- Etex has instructional videos on its website to assist customers in setting up an account that enables them to make online payments and access their account information. Also, Etex sent its customers a newsletter reminding them on ways to communicate and do business with Etex without having to come in to our offices.

With many of our local schools closing for the remainder of the school year, Etex understands the importance of students having broadband connectivity that allows access to distance learning. Etex is working with our local schools to provide additional hotspots for community access to internet service.

Etex has taken several steps to ensure the safety of its employees while trying to curb the spread of COVID-19. During this pandemic, our technicians are often in harm's way, not knowing whether the home where they are installing equipment has a person who has been exposed to or has contracted COVID-19, yet they continue to install services to these customers. Etex's technicians are doing their best to help the people in our communities, knowing how much people rely on their communications services. Some of the measures that Etex has implemented to protect not only our technicians but all of our employees include:

- implementing a work-from-home policy as needed;
- CEO, Charlie Cano, provided updates to employees on the COVID-19 as to the severity of the event and steps the company is taking to protect its customers and employees;
- provided all employees with various products (e.g. hand sanitizer, Lysol, Kleenex, personal protective equipment, etc.) to avoid the spread of COVID-19; and
- making UV-C light sanitizers available for customers and employees mobile phones at no charge.

Etex is very proud of the service it provides and the communities it serves. As demonstrated during this COVID-19 crisis, broadband connectivity is of upmost importance to every Texan and even more so to those Texans that live in rural areas like those that Etex serves. Etex has seen customer requests for broadband service double in just the last week. This crisis shows how important it is for small, rural companies like Etex to continue to receive Texas Universal Service Fund support.

To the extent it may be necessary, Etex respectfully requests Commission action related to the suspension of rules requiring tariff pre-approval to waive installation charges or offer promotions to assist customers during this crisis.

Should the Commission or any customers have questions or concerns, we remain available at 800.333.9779 or ccano@etexcoop.net.

Sincerely,



Charlie Cano
General Manager and CEO

